

# Health & Safety in the Workplace

When an employer allows you into their workplace, you are expected to pay attention to the safety precautions that are in place to protect all workers. Safety at work is very important, and even those workplaces that appear to be perfectly safe can have hazards that need to be known.

In Ireland, all workplaces are required to have a Safety Statement - a document that informs all workers of the dangers in the workplace, and the precautions that are necessary in order to remain safe. Your employer is likely to discuss some of the hazards that you may face during your work with them, and to point out some of the precautions you need to pay attention to.

Safety in the workplace requires both management and workers to co-operate together - so if you notice something you think is dangerous or might be a hazard, it is also your responsibility to report it to your supervisor!

## Common hazards

Some hazards are common to almost all workplaces, for example, slipping, tripping or falling. It is up to you to be careful as you go about the workplace. Also, just about every workplace could go on fire - so all workplaces should have well defined fire safety plans and appropriate fire extinguishing equipment in regular positions throughout the building. Your employer may discuss these plans with you during your stay with them.

Bullying is also regarded as a workplace hazard that is legally protected against. If you are subject to any form of bullying you should report it to your work supervisor or school coordinator.

## Manual Handling

Far too many people hurt their back while lifting things at work. If lifting anything unusually heavy is a part of your placement, you should expect to receive special training. Otherwise, follow these guidelines:

- Bend at the knees
- Keep your back straight
- Get a good grip
- Use your leg muscles to do the lifting (not your back)
- Keep your head up and your feet apart

Typical hazards to be aware of...

...in offices - hazards may include work using computers (position of screen/chair/lighting must be correct), electrical equipment, lifting heavy packages, and slipping, tripping or falling.

...in retail stores - hazards may include moving vehicles (e.g. fork-lifts), working at heights, lifting and carrying goods and aggression from customers.

...in factories, building sites and engineering works - hazards may include moving machinery and equipment, use of hazardous substances, moving vehicles, lifting, noise and vibration etc.

If you think your work environment is affecting your health, you should report it to your supervisor or school co-ordinator.

## Health & Safety Signs

During your placement you may notice signs designed to warn you of a hazard or prohibition. Most are easy to understand - but you should ask if any are unclear. Examples:

